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ABSTRACT

In order to determine the extent of community need for and interest in a proposed graduate program in communication at Cleveland State University, a market research survey was conducted of a random sample of 402 employers from four broad categories: business and industry, the communication industries, nonprofit associations, and government agencies. Trained professional interviewers conducted the standardized interview by phone. To insure objectivity, interviewers and interviewees were not informed about the actual initiation of the survey by the Department of Communication. The objectives of the program were stated, but no persuasive messages or other information were presented to the respondents. The survey results indicate that there is a ready market for graduates of the communication department's proposed master's degree program. Moreover, the data indicate that employers have persons of various titles engaged in communication problem-solving activities, that they recognize a need for improved communication problem solving, and that they are interested in evaluating these problems and in hiring the personnel necessary to accomplish this task. Ten tables of findings are included. (LL)

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JUSTIFYING A GRADUATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION: DEMONSTRATING EMPLOYABILITY

Stanley J. Baran and F. Floyd Shoemaker

Any proposed academic program must be justified on traditional pedagogical and intellectual bases. Today, however, it is just as important to include in that justification the practical concern of "hireability," or the state of the employment market for graduates of that program. As career opportunities for graduates of advanced programs in the social and behavioral sciences become increasingly scarce, such practical concerns become more important to graduate councils, boards of regents, and trustees.

Responding to the need to support its proposed master's degree program, the Communication Department at the Cleveland State University decided to launch a market study in the greater metropolitan Cleveland area. The department contracted with Marketing Research of Cleveland to construct and conduct a market analysis of the need and potential demand for graduates of its proposed program. The Communication Department has the personnel and expertise necessary to conduct such an investigation, but asked Marketing Research to perform the analysis in order to insure objectivity in the design and implementation of the study.

Survey Procedure

The marketing firm drew a random sample of 402 employers from four broad categories: business and industry, the communication industries, non-profit associations, and government agencies. This probability sample was drawn from the Greater Cleveland Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area which includes Cuyahoga, Lake, Medina, and Geauga counties in northeast Ohio.

The measurement instrument was pre-tested in December and the actual survey was conducted in January, 1976. Trained professional interviewers performed the survey by telephone. Each interview was standardized and began:

> Hello, I am , a representative of Marketing Research of Cleveland, and I am doing a study for Cleveland State University to determine the extent of community need and interest in a proposed graduate program in communication at CSU. The objectives of this program are:
> 1. To train people as practitioners in a wide variety of communication fields (such as public relations, advertising and journalism);
> 2. To help individuals manage organizational conflict; and
> 3. To train people in interpersonal relations
>
> I would greatly appreciate it if you would agree to ans er a few questions. Please be assured that your identity will be kept in strictest confidence.

To insure objectivity, interviewers and interviewees alike were naive as to the actual initiation of the survey by the Department of Communication. Other than the introduction and explanation mentioned above, no persuasive messages or other information were provided to the respondents. The respondent from each company or agency was the highest available individual involved in the hiring of new employees.

Results

The survey results indicate that there is a ready market for graduates of the Communication Department's proposed master's degree program.

As Table 1 indicates, most of the sampled companies employ people in communication problem-solving activities. Some sixty-eight percent of the companies reported that they employ persons as liaisons in settling interpersonal disputes. Other communications activities of company

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personnel include the investigation of conflicts or potential conflicts, providing information where none exists, correcting misinformation, and deciding on strategies for communication with the public.

Table 2 shows the number of people, by employer type, who are employed in the communication problem-solving roles mentioned by the respondents. This table indicates that forty-two companies employ more than 100 persons in communication problem-solving activities. However, most companies employ from one to five persons in such roles. Fifty-two companies reported that they employ from six to ten employees in such activities, and fifty-seven reported no employees involved in communication problem-solving.

Table 3 supplements Table 2. It indicates the existing positions from which persons might enroll in a proposed or existing M.A. program in communication and the positions they might assume upon graduation from that program. Public information director and personnel director were mentioned as titles of persons engaged in communication problem-solving activities by sixty-three percent of the 402 companies surveyed.

The employer sample also was asked to name communication related areas in their organizations which were not functioning as efficiently and effectively as they might wish. Their responses appear in Table 4.

Conflicts between employees and managers or executives were mentioned most frequently. This was closely followed by "design of internal communication media."

The "hirability" of graduates of an M.A. degree program in communication depends, in large part, on the employers' need to deal with communication related problems.

Table 5 depicts the level of frustration that sampled employers experience in dealing with internal and external communication problems. Some thirty-five percent of the respondents reported that they were often, or very often, frustrated by either internal or external communication problems. Nearly eighty percent of the respondents reported such frustrations at least some of the time.

If the frustration documented in Table 5 does indeed exist, it seems logical to assess the employers' desire to evaluate those problems and their interest in hiring communication graduates to conduct that evaluation. Each sample respondent was asked, "How interested are you in evaluating the effectiveness of company communication inside and outside your organization?" Respondents were then asked, "How interested is your comapny in hiring people with training to evaluate communication effectiveness?"

The response to these questions appear in Table 6.

While a large number of respondents answered affirmatively to the first question, 280 employers, approximately seventy percent, said that they would be interested in hiring persons trained to deal with communication problems.

Employers were then asked to estimate the precent of people in their organizations who would "benefit from and improve their job performance through an advanced degree program in applied communication theory and skills." The data in Table 7 indicate the value that employers place upon an advanced degree in communication.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents reported that they believed that at least some of their employees would benefit from such a program. Seventy-three went so far as to say that more than ninety percent of their people would benefit from such training.

If such a large number of employees might potentially benefit from a communication M.A. program, how many employers would actually encourage their employees to enroll in such a program as that proposed, in this case, at Cleveland State University?

Table 8 shows that 176 employers would encourage their employees to enroll in the proposed graduate program. This represents forty-four percent of those employers sampled.

The respondents were asked, "If one of your employees were to enroll in the master's degree program in communication at CSU, would your organization help finance his or her higher education?"

As demonstrated in Table 9, twenty-five percent of the respondents said that they would definitely provide financial aid to their employees who would enroll in the M.A. program, and about forty percent would either definitely or probably provide such aid.

As can be seen in Table 10, employers of all sizes, from less than twenty employees to more than 1,000 would be willing to lend financial assistance to employees enrolled in an M.A. program. However, companies with less than forty employees would be more willing to provide financial aid than some of the larger organizations.

Discussion

The data presented here demonstrate that a need and a market for graduates of the proposed master's degree program, in this case at Cleveland State University do exist. Employers have persons of various titles engaged in communication problem-solving activities. These positions exist in large numbers in a wide range of different sized companies. Employers recognize a need for improved communication problem-solving and are frustrated by both internal and external communication problems. These employers are interested in evaluating these problems and hiring the personnel necessary to accomplish this task. They perceive that many of their employees could benefit from an advanced degree in communication; and, more significantly, large numbers would encourage their employees to enroll in an advanced program and would help to finance the cost of that education.

We present the results of this survey because it is becoming apparent that proposed graduate programs, and even some existing programs, in communication are threatened by boards of trustees or graduate councils. Many new and existing programs in a number of disciplines are or will come under scrutiny because of increasing financial uncertainty in higher education.

But the resistance to advanced programs in our discipline takes the form of a number of difficult questions: "Just what <u>is</u> communication?" "How is this communication different from psychology (or political science, or this or that)?" "What can your people do when they graduate, will they be hired and by whom?" The present study speaks to this last question.

In our field, we believe that an M.A. in communication is a valuable career tool, we believe that the bearers of those degrees are quite hirable. Because of tightening university budgets, however, we are now being called on to prove or demonstrate the employability of our graduates.

The need for communication specialists and problem-solvers is increasingly obvious to us in the discipline; this survey is one means of demonstrating that reality to those who would ask us for proof.

TABLE 1

Companies Currently Employing Personnel Engaged in Communication Problem-Solving Activities

Type of Company	ACTIVITY: Investigate Conflicts	Provide Information	Correct Misinformation	Liaison Interpersonal Disputes	External Communication	Total Companies Contacted
Manufacturers	60	68	66	79	67	118
Mining/Construction	7	5	7	6	8	12
Transportation/Utillties	15	18	19	22	17	26
Wholesale/Retail	54	55	56	64	57	94
Finance/Insurance	10	9	14	16	13	21
Service/Misc.	34	43	45	48	56	75
Hospitals	1	1	1	1	0	1
Federal Agencies	6	8	8	7	7	11
School/Universities	18	21	21	18	21	29
Other Government	9	10	8	11	11	15
Total	214	238	245	272	257	402
%	53%	59%	61%	68%	64%	100%

TABLE 2

Number of People Currently Employed in Communication Problem-Solving Activities by Company

Type of Company	Number of People											Total Companies Contacted
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-30	31-40	41-60	61-80	81-100	More Than 100	
Manufacturers	20	56	17	6	1	4	2	0	0	2	10	118
Mining/Construction	2	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	12
Transportation/Utilities	2	15	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	26
Wholesale/Retail	15	45	9	3	2	3	0	3	1	1	12	94
Finance/Insurance	3	13	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	21
Service/Misc.	8	38	8	3	5	3	1	2	0	0	7	75
Hospitals	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Federal Agencies	1	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	11
School/Universities	4	11	5	2	3	2	0	0	0	0	2	29
Other Government	2	2	6	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	15

Each number in the table represents the number of companies of that particular type that employ a number of people within the given limits.

TABLE 3

Titles of Personnel Engaged in Communication Problem-Solving Activities

Name of Position	Frequency of Mention
1. Business executive	171
2. Government executive - local	16
3. Business manager	171
4. Sales manager	57
5. Government manager - local	53
6. Government manager - regional, state, federal	2
7. Business supervisor/Administrative Assistant	53
8. Government supervisor/Administrative Assistant - local	21
9. Government supervisor/Administrative Assistant - regional, state, federal	1
10. Business secretarial	17
11. Personnel director	125
12. Public information director	130
13. Marketing manager/executive	57
14. All personnel	6
15. Government secretarial	1

TABLE 4

Employers' Perception of Own Communication Problem-Solving Needs

Name of Problem	Frequency of Mention
1. Conflicts between employees	10
2. Conflicts between employees and managers or executives	38
3. Conflicts between managers and executives	23
4. Communication with general public	8
5. Design mass media content	4
6. Problems relating to specific external publics	11
7. Executive grievances	1
8. Sales or marketing problems	6
9. Design internal communication media	37
10. All areas	16
11. Communication with students	1
12. Language problems	1
13. Interpersonal problems	3

TABLE 5

Employers' Frustration at Communication Problems

Frequency of Frustration	Internal Communication Problems	External Communication Problems
Very Often	54	18
Often	49	20
Sometimes	111	69
Rarely	129	152
Never	58	139
No Response	1	4

TABLE 6

Employer Interest in Communication Evaluation and Hiring Evaluators

Level of Interest	Desire Communication Evaluation	Interested in Hiring Communication Evaluators
Definitely Interested	63	140
Probably Interested	95	140
Don't Know	44	49
Probably Not Interested	87	54
Definitely Not Interested	113	19

TABLE 7

Employers' Estimate of the Percent of Their Employees Who Would Benefit from An Advanced Degree in Applied Communication Theory and Skills

% Benefiting	Number of Employees
91-100	73
81-90	2
71-80	15
61-70	2
51-60	1
41-50	25
31-40	8
21-30	20
11-20	18
1-10	74
0	128

TABLE 8

Number of Employers Who Would Encourage Employees to Enroll in Master's Communication Program at Cleveland State

Level of Encouragement	Number of Employers
Definitely encourage	77
Probably encourage	99
Don't Know	58
Probably not encourage	113
Definitely not encourage	55

TABLE 9

Employers Who Would Provide Financial Aid for Employees Enrolled in Masters Communication Problem at Cleveland State

Willingness to Help	Number of Employers
Definitely Help	106
Probably Help	55
Don't Know	53
Probably Not Help	80
Definitely Not Help	108

TABLE 10

Employers Who Would Provide Financial Aid
by Size of Company

Number of Employees	Employers		
	Definitely Help	Probably Help	Don't Know
Less than 20	24	10	8
21-40	17	4	7
41-60	11	4	8
61-80	8	5	4
81-100	6	6	4
101-200	6	6	4
201-300	9	6	0
301-400	5	1	1
401-500	1	1	1
501-600	2	1	0
601-700	1	0	2
701-800	4	0	0
801-900	1	1	1
901-1000	0	0	1
More than 1000	4	7	3